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BAUCUS BILL WILL BRING FEDERAL DOLLARS TO TRIBES FOR FOSTER CARE, ADOPTION

*Proposal puts Native American communities on par with states in federal funding for
child welfare services*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today introduced legislation that will provide Indian Tribes with the same direct access to federal funding for foster care and adoption services that states currently receive. The Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access Act of 2007 will provide federal funding that will allow Native American Tribes to establish independent foster care and adoption programs. The federal government currently reimburses states for eligible foster care and adoption assistance costs incurred as part of providing foster care or adoption assistance to children under their jurisdiction. However, under existing law, Tribal spending on foster care and adoption may only be reimbursed through contracts with the states in which they are located. The Baucus proposal amends the Social Security Act to allow Tribes to receive direct reimbursement for eligible costs related to foster care services, adoption assistance services, employee training and education, administrative costs related to case planning and case management, and establishment and operation of required data collection systems.

“This bill provides Tribes with the ability to serve their children directly with culturally appropriate care and understanding,” said Baucus. **“This bill serves some of our most vulnerable children and Congress must stand up for those kids. It is only logical to put Tribal adoption services on equal footing with the states, and I intend to work with my colleagues to do just that.”**

Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access Act improves the Native American child welfare system without significant costs or new federal programs. The bill requires Tribal adoption and foster care programs to meet the same federal performance requirements that are required of states to ensure the safety of and accountability for children placed in Tribal foster care programs. Additionally, the legislation gives more authority to HHS to modify agreements with Tribes in a manner that would advance the best interests and safety of children served by the Tribe.

The Baucus bill is being co-sponsored by Senators Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), John McCain (R-N.M.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.).

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